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SHARED

VIEWS

News and Information

for the Communities of the
Bitterroot National Forest

Volume 1

Issue 6



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We welcome your questions,
feedback or ideas! Please
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A MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING FOREST SUPERVISOR

Taking everything into account over the past two years, a lot has been accomplished since the wildland fires of 2000. Immediately following the fires, there was a superb display of community spirit as both agency crews and local volunteers accomplished an unprecedented amount of fire rehabilitation work in record time. Within a few short months, crews stabilized over 4,500 acres of slopes, seeded over 250 acres, rehabilitated 200 miles of fireline, sprayed noxious weeds on 195 acres, and replaced or removed 316 undersized culverts.

Our State and Private Forestry program, through partnerships with local agencies such as the Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development, helped many private landowners through this difficult time. State and Private Forestry provided assistance with fire rehabilitation work, hazardous fuel reduction projects, replaced and repaired burned fences and other infrastructures damaged by the fires, repaired erosion damage on private lands resulting from heavy rains in burned areas, created new conservation education programs with local schools, and provided grant money to enhance economic development.

On the heels of emergency recovery work, the Forest made a commitment to move as fast as possible while meeting National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) policies to develop and initiate a Burned Area Recovery Project plan. The Plan called for actions to rehabilitate roads and damaged watersheds; remove dead and dying hazardous fuels, and initiate reforestation in heavily burned areas. Work began with the Post Fire Assessment in December 2000; followed by the Burned Area Recovery Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in May 2001; Final EIS in October 2001; and the signing of the Record of Decision (ROD) in December 2001. Although the ROD was contested in court, environmentalists, the timber industry, and the Forest Service, were able to reach a Settlement Agreement in a court ordered mediation by February 2002.

Recovery work began immediately after the Settlement Agreement. This included rehabilitation on roads and watersheds, and the preparation, advertisement, and implementation of salvages agreed upon in the Settlement Agreement. The planting of over 850,000 tree seedlings on nearly 3,000 acres has been completed. Another 1,000 acres will be reforested this fall.

Noxious weeds were not addressed in the Burned Area Recovery FEIS as the Forest recognized this issue is not limited to the burned areas. The forest-wide treatment of noxious weeds will be addressed in a separate EIS. The preparation of this document was contracted out in June of 2001, the DEIS was released in March of 2002, and the Final EIS is scheduled to be published in July 2002.

While the major focus on the Bitterroot Forest has been on work related to the fires of 2000, we have not lost sight of the management needs of the remaining 80% of the Forest that were not impacted by those fires. The Forest provides countless opportunities for its users; beautiful lakes, trails, wilderness, clean water, fisheries, wildflowers, camping, places for group events, places for solitude. We are dedicated to doing what is right for the land in all these areas. With the help of the community, we will continue to do what's right for the forest.

Lesley W. Thompson

Spike Thompson
Acting Forest Supervisor

What do you see on our

"cover" photo?

See page 4

With the help of the community,
we will continue to do what's right
for the forest.



Harvested Unit—Roan Burke TS



Harvested Unit in Mixed Severity
Burned Area—Roan Burke TS



Snag Retention in Elk Point 1
Timber Sale

U.S.D.A., NAL

JUL 30 2002

Cataloging Prep



■ Two thirds of the lands burned will be left to regenerate naturally

■ 53,000 acres yet to be inventoried for reforestation needs

■ 50,000 acres currently proposed for planting

Don't miss the Walk By The Light Of The Moon interpretive walks series. There are four "Walks" remaining scheduled for June 22, July 22, August 21, and the final one on September 20. For further information contact Julie Schreck, Conservation Education Coordinator at 363-7100.

that still need to be surveyed for planting needs. This year the Forest is planting almost 4,000 acres, more than twice the acreage planted last year. About two thirds of the area burned by the fires will be left to reforest on its own.

The majority of planting will occur in burned ponderosa pine forests. Collecting enough pine seed to meet the Forest's needs is one of the biggest challenges due to the low occurrence of high elevation ponderosa pine cone crops. Some of the high elevation ponderosa pine trees will be fertilized this fall to help enhance the cone production. Neighboring

FORESTATION

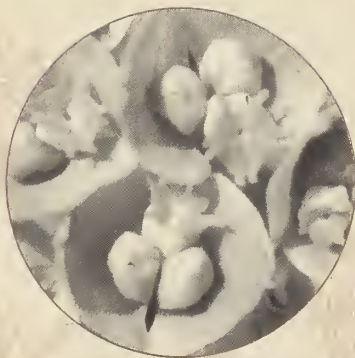
Forests like the Lolo, Deerlodge, and Helena National Forests are helping out by providing seed and fertilizing trees where the genetic match is right.

The wildland fires of 2000 created reforestation needs far beyond the forest's normal program. In addition to cone collection and the planting of young seedlings, forest personnel will need to monitor the success of natural seeding, tree survival and growth on thousands of acres. Funding for this program is provided

mostly through the National Fire Plan, but there are not enough funds available to cover the extensive reforestation needs that will continue into the future. This year, trees seedlings have been purchased with money from the National Arbor Day Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, and donations from private individuals and organizations across the country. These contributions are a testimonial to the heart-felt desire of so many people who truly care for our public lands.



BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST NOXIOUS WEED TREATMENT PROJECT



Above: Leafy Spurge



Above: Knapweed

During the scoping period for the Burned Area Recovery Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the public came forward with many concerns and issues. One of the concerns was the potential invasion of noxious weeds within the vast acreage of the burned areas of the forest.

So, why weren't noxious weeds addressed in the Burned Area Recovery Final EIS and what is the Forest doing about this concern? Noxious weeds occur in over 267,000 acres of the Forest's 1.6 million acres, and not just in the burned area. The Forest contracted Maxim Technologies, Inc. to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement for the Noxious Weed Treatment Project from Draft (EIS) to Final (EIS).

Forest personnel reviewed the analysis in the DEIS to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations governing National Forest Management before it was released on March 15. Forest specialists and line officers hosted open houses following the release in Darby, Hamilton, and Stevensville. A public comment period followed the release that ended April 30.

The purpose of the Noxious Weed Project Treatment DEIS is to propose treatments to reduce the occurrence of weeds in specific areas and to control the spread of noxious weeds to weed free areas on and adjacent to the Forest.

Treatment methods were considered under three Alternatives, A-C and a "No Action" Alternative, Alternative D. The proposed action, Alternative A, outlines treatments for 35,000 acres using a combination ground and aerial herbicide application, biological agents, mechanical (mowing, hand-pulling), cultural seeding (i.e., planting/seeding desirable plant species capable of out-competing invasive weeds and controlled grazing), and education and prevention programs.

Public reaction to the DEIS is mixed. The Forest received about 75 comments during the comment period. While some people support the proposed action and ground-based application of herbicides, others have expressed concern about the use of aerially applied herbicides on the National Forest. All of the comments received will be evaluated, considered, and responded to in the Final EIS.

Under the Noxious Weed Treatment Project EIS, Forest employees and contractors would accomplish the project work over the next 5-10 years. The Final EIS should be released with the Record of Decision in July 2002.

If you haven't already submitted your name and address for the Noxious Weeds EIS mailing list and want to be included you can call 406 363-7167.

For further information contact North Zone Interdisciplinary Team Leader Ken Hotchkiss at 777-5461, Stevensville District Ranger Jeanue Higgins at 777-5461, Darby/Sula District Ranger Craig Bobzien at 821-3913, or Weed Program Leader Lori Clark at 375-2600.

Noxious weeds appear in over 267,000 acres of the Forest's 1.6 million acres.

STATE & PRIVATE FORESTRY



A lot has been said about the funding and collaborative services provided by the R1-R4 State & Private Forestry since the fires of 2000. However, it is very likely most folks are not aware of the other State and Private Forestry programs. These programs cover natural resource conservation education, forest health protection, cooperative fire protection, forest stewardship, economic action, and urban and community forestry.

Like many of Montana's communities, the Bitterroot Valley is linked to the production of natural resource-based goods and services. There are three Economic Action Programs through S&PF; Rural Community Assistance, Forest Products Conservation and Recycling, and the Market Development and Expansion; Wood in Transportation. These programs are available to help local communities adapt to and benefit from the impacts of economic changes.

Through partnerships with our State Forester, State & Private Forestry is able to provide important tools for monitoring, management and protection of our forests with an emphasis on nonfederal forestland stewardship through these programs. The programs are geared to help facilitate sound stewardship across land ownership boundaries, while maintaining flexibility for individual forest landowners to pursue their objectives. The programs provide technical advice, and focus on financial assistance utilizing partnerships with other local agencies.

In the past two years, S&PF has provided funding through the National Fire Plan for post fire emergency rehabilitation and community assistance, fencing and infrastructure programs, hazardous fuels mitigation, multi resource stewardship, economic action to demonstrate the ability to create, add value to, and diversify economic options in local communities using small diameter material and/or traditionally underutilized wood products, economic action pilot programs, noxious weed management, and community planning for fire protection. Reflecting back on the fires of 2000 and their impact on the local communities of the Bitterroot Valley, Jim Freeman, president of the Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development commented, "I think people found the fires simply overwhelming. They lost control over much of their lives. Through S&PF sponsored BIRT (Bitterroot Interagency Recovery Team), they're finding out that they aren't powerless."

To learn more about Forest Service S&PF programs in Montana go to:

www.fs.fed.us/r1-r4/spf/montana/mtindex.htm. To learn more about the

Bitterroot National Forest State & Private Forestry program contact

Nan Christianson, S&PF staff officer at 363-7100.

"I think people found the fires simply overwhelming.

They lost control over much of their lives.

Through S&PF sponsored BIRT, they're finding out that they aren't powerless."

MCCLAIN LANDSLIDE PROJECT

The Bitterroot National Forest is in the process of implementing a project to minimize erosion and the accumulation of sediment into McClain Creek. The sediment originates from the McClain Creek Landslide. The landslide, located on an upper northwest-facing slope of the McClain Creek drainage five miles northwest of Florence, Montana, is more than a half-mile long and 200 feet wide (see photo 1). The first major movement of debris down this mountainside occurred in 1970. Between 1970 and 1990 the slide continued to show movement at a notably increased rate in 1983, and then again in 1990.

A tort claim was filed against the Forest Service by adjacent landowners in 1994 alleging damage to their property as a result of the landslide. Among the alleged damages to their property included the deposition of

sediment into their irrigation system. A Settlement Agreement was reached in November 1998 between the plaintiffs and the Forest Service. The Forest Service agreed to develop and execute a project to remove surface water from the landslide, revegetate the landslide surface area and decrease the heavy sedimentation flowing into McClain Creek and the landowner's irrigation system.

An Environmental Assessment of the landslide area was prepared outlining two alternatives; Alternative 1: No Action, and Alternative 2: an alternative that would include the installation, maintenance, and monitoring of drainage systems on and above the top of the landslide; and the revegetation of the landslide surface to decrease the flow of heavy sedimentation into McClain Creek. A final decision was made in May 2001 selecting Alternative 2.

After geotechnical investigations by Rodney Prellwitz and the completion of his Stability Analysis Report, 2001, Prellwitz designed drainage systems to divert surface and groundwater away from the slide. All Terrain Excavating from Polson, Montana performed the excavation work for the drainage system using a spider hoe excavator (see photo 2). Fourteen drains, known as Eljen drains (see photo 3), ranging in length from 50 to 260 feet were installed in the drainage system. These drains are located at three sites; the upper site located at the top of the slide; middle site located 600 to 1000 feet downhill; and the lower site between the middle site and the upper FS Road 1311. Monitoring stations (see photo 4) have been installed mainly on the west perimeter of the slide. The monitoring stations are designed to independently measure the flow rates of surface water and groundwater drained from the landslide. This work was completed October 2001.



In the fall of 2001, the Bitterroot National Forest botany crew began implementation of the revegetation portion of the project. They planted 700 shrubs in bare areas throughout the slide, installed straw wattles and scattered logs in strategic locations to control surface erosion. Two experimental erosion control blanket test plots were installed in a raw area of the slide directly above the #1311 road. The implementation of the revegetation plan will likely continue into the year 2005.

Revegetation and erosion control measures will continue to be evaluated and modified for improvements if needed each field season. It is expected to take until 2005 to monitor and evaluate the overall effectiveness of this project.

For further information about the McClain Landslide Project contact Terri Anderson, Project Engineer at (406) 363-7100, or Betsy Ballard, Project Coordinator at (406) 777-5461.

On the cover:
Skid trail after unit harvest
completed over snow.

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Did you know there have been about 70 research projects on the Bitterroot National Forest? 58 of those projects started between 2000 and 2002, and 33 of those projects are related to the fires of 2000. To view a listing of research projects on the Bitterroot National Forest go to: www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/planning/forest_index_planning.htm



See "Burned Area Reforestation" page 2 for more information.



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WEBSITES OF INTEREST



<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot>

Log on to find out about the post-fire assessment, steps towards restoration and recovery, the National Fire Plan, and related links.

Check out these other hot websites too:

Bitterroot National Forest www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot
Lolo National Forest www.fs.fed.us/r1/lolo
Living with Fire www.fs.fed.us/rm/fire_game
Firewise www.firewise.org
National Fire Plan www.fireplan.gov

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